

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Wednesday, September 15, 2010

Polisario Front Threatens to Imprison Its Top Police Official For Backing Moroccan Autonomy Plan to End Sahara Conflict

International Community Urged to Protect Rights, Safety of Polisario Police Inspector General Who is Stuck in Mauritania, Unable to Rejoin Family in Refugee Camp in Tindouf Algeria

Washington, DC (Sept. 15, 2010) — Efforts of top Polisario police official Mustapha Salma Ould Sidi Mouloud to encourage an end of the 35-year-old Western Sahara stalemate through an autonomy solution hit a major roadblock this week. He revealed that the Polisario has threatened him with arrest if he tries to rejoin his family in Algeria's Tindouf refugee camps and share his support for Morocco's compromise autonomy plan as the best solution to reunite Sahrawis. Sidi Mouloud announced his backing for the plan on a UN-sponsored family visit to southern Morocco to see his father for the first time in 31 years. The Polisario denounced his statement as treason and warned that Sidi Mouloud faced arrest on his return. He is now encamped in Zouirat, Mauritania, close to Algeria's border on the long road back to Tindouf.

"To freely express one's opinion is treason?" Sidi Mouloud asked incredulously in a TV interview, according to the weekly Paris news magazine *Jeune Afrique*. "My personal security no longer depends on me alone, from now on it's the responsibility of the whole world." Appeals have been made to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon by Sahrawi groups urging steps to ensure Sidi Mouloud's safety in Tindouf.

Last month in Smara, Morocco, he said, "After 31 years of separation I was able to meet my father and my relatives. I took the opportunity to tour Morocco. I was impressed by Morocco's major progress in different sectors and the major development boom in the Sahrawi territories, which made me change my position." The Polisario leader said Morocco's autonomy plan was the best option for Sahrawis to "achieve our main objective"—preserving their culture and identity.

Sidi Mouloud, son of Sheikh Salma Mouloud, leader of the Rgulba tribe (largest in W. Sahara), vowed to share his views back in Tindouf, and urged Sahrawis to set aside differences and engage in dialogue to resolve the conflict.

"Sidi Mouloud has shown great courage in recognizing the new realities in the Sahara and real opportunities for Sahrawis to build a future," said Robert M. Holley, Executive Director, Moroccan American Center for Policy. "He has literally put his life on the line to speak his mind and do what is best to bring Sahrawis together. That is true leadership; other Polisario officials should take a lesson."

"The international community and human rights advocates should also pay closer attention," said Holley. "No clearer case can be made for the urgent need to enforce international guarantees on refugee rights to freedom of movement and freedom of expression—not to mention personal safety. If refugees in Tindouf could exercise these rights today, all Sahrawis would have a future and this long dispute would be history."

"Unfortunately, most Polisario leaders and their Algerian hosts appear intent to continue the old politics and create new provocations that prolong the conflict and drive Sahrawis apart. Witness plans by Polisario supporters to launch a flotilla from Spanish waters to W. Sahara in the New Year. Unless the international community intervenes, this action will likely raise tensions in the region and derail prospects for successful negotiations. That is not responsible leadership, nor does it serve the Sahrawi people's interest."

Today, more than 17,000 refugees are wait-listed for the UN Family Visit program and most wait years to see families. On April 6, UN Sec. General Ban Ki-moon reported the parties to the conflict agreed to build a road from Tindouf to Morocco so more refugees can visit. So far this year, as many as 1,800 refugees have escaped the camps on their own, making the dangerous trek across open desert to reach Moroccan Sahara.

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The Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP) is a non-profit organization whose principal mission is to inform opinion makers, government officials and interested publics in the United States about political and social developments in Morocco and the role being played by the Kingdom of Morocco in broader strategic developments in North Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. For more, please visit www.moroccanamericanpolicy.org

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Monday, September 20, 2010

Polisario Rebuked for Blocking UN Family Visit to Refugee Camps in Algeria As Returning Police Chief Risks Arrest to Back Autonomy to End Sahara Dispute

Washington, DC (Sept. 20, 2010) — Amid growing concerns about the safety and rights of Sahrawi refugees, the Polisario Front today was urged to step back from recent actions clamping down on freedoms and access in the Tindouf refugee camps in Algeria. Late Friday, a UN-sponsored flight for the Family Visit program was forced to turn back on a runway in Tindouf and return to Smara in southern Morocco after Polisario officials refused to allow its passengers to disembark. Polisario threats of arrest and even death also continue for its own top police official, Mustapha Salma Ould Sidi Mouloud, who is trying to rejoin his family and advocate a compromise autonomy solution to reunite Sahrawis and end the decades-long Sahara conflict. Sidi Mouloud declared his support for the Moroccan autonomy plan on a recent family visit to see his father in southern Morocco for the first time in 31 years.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issued a statement over the weekend expressing concern about the blocked flight, which it said had been "well-coordinated" with all parties. "To our disappointment, the 20 passengers on the flight were prevented from disembarking by Polisario representatives in Tindouf. UNHCR had no choice but to fly the passengers back." UNHCR called the family visits important "Confidence Building Measures" for the Sahara-conflict parties and wanted to clarify why the Polisario refused the visit.

On a desert road in Mauritania, Polisario Chief Police Inspector Sidi Mouloud said he was returning to Tindouf "despite death threats" from Polisario leaders, reported Italian news agency *Adnkronos International*. "I am aware that my life is in danger but I decided to return to Tindouf because I want to tell everyone that the policy pursued by the Polisario leadership is wrong," he said. "Instead of acting for the interests of the Saharawi people," he said Polisario leaders have focused only on their own interests.

Last month in Smara, Morocco, he said, "After 31 years of separation I was able to meet my father and my relatives. I took the opportunity to tour Morocco. I was impressed by Morocco's major progress in different sectors and the major development boom in the Sahrawi territories, which made me change my position."

The Polisario leader said the autonomy plan proposed by Morocco is the best option for Sahrawis to "achieve our main objective"—preserving their culture and identity. Sidi Mouloud, son of Sheikh Salma Mouloud, leader of the Rguibat tribe (largest in W. Sahara), vowed to share his views in Tindouf, urging Sahrawis to set aside differences and open dialogue to resolve the conflict.

Now there is serious concern about Sidi Mouloud's safety. Appeals have gone out to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon from Sahrawi groups urging steps to ensure Sidi Mouloud's safety in Tindouf. In the US, the Leadership Council for Human Rights said it was monitoring the situation closely, and president Kathryn Cameron Porter worried Polisario leaders might "harm anyone who interferes with their personal desires."

"It is unfortunate the Polisario chose this moment to go back on their agreement on the Family Visits," said Robert M. Holley, Executive Director, Moroccan American Center for Policy. "It is clear Sahrawis want more, not less, contact with family they haven't seen in decades. It is also clear from Sidi Mouloud's courageous return that Sahrawis in Tindouf want a solution to the Sahara dispute that reunites them, not roadblocks and provocations that continue to drive them apart."

"I urge Polisario leaders to step back from the threats and provocations and recognize the realities shaping the region. Listen to Sidi Mouloud and let him share his story. This is an opportunity to join in a compromise that finally ends the Sahara conflict and brings families together in a distinct, thriving Sahrawi society. It also realizes the rights refugees are demanding themselves, which are guaranteed by international law."

In a follow-up statement issued today on the blocked family visit, UNHCR noted that Algeria, Morocco, and Sahrawi leaders agreed last week to expand Confidence Building Measures by building a road from Tindouf to Morocco to let more refugees visit families. More than 17,000 refugees are currently wait-listed for the Family Visit program and most wait years to see families. So far this year, as many as 1,800 refugees have escaped the camps on their own, making the dangerous trek across open desert to reach Moroccan Sahara.

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